

A Doom of One's Own

Remake this violent game, and cast yourself—or your enemies—in the role of the demon

You're stumbling down a futuristic steel-walled hallway toting a plasma rifle.

You're running low on ammo, your health is slipping, and around each corner is still another mutant with a shotgun ready to blow your head off. Suddenly you hear a song waft in from the distance, a melody that is frighteningly familiar. "I love you," the sing-song, sappy voice warbles. "You love me." Where is he? You turn in every direction looking for his wretched form. Suddenly he

appears in front of you, smiling, singing through his teeth and tapping his big purple foot on the ground. Barney the Purple Dinosaur from Hell!

You annihilate him before he can finish the rest of the song.

"Jeez," you think to yourself. "Thank God my 2-year-old wasn't awake to see that."

We've all got our own personal vision of purgatory. Maybe that's what makes the PC game Doom so immensely popular. The creators of Doom, a DOS-based shareware game available on the Internet and many online services since last De-



Smash hit: The game's brains (clockwise from left), Adrian Carmack, Jay Wilbur, Kevin Cloud and John Romero, have inspired a flood of add-ons, discussion groups and, maybe, a movie.

cember, have shared their programming secrets publicly, allowing fans to tinker with the original game and create their own versions. These Doom add-ons, called "wads," are stored in data files named with the .WAD suffix. Other players can download wads and add them to their games. Some of these files radically change the way Doom looks and sounds, allowing players to exorcise a few demons of their own.

"There are all kinds of wads, including graphics, sounds, add-on levels and replays of games," says Hank Leukart, a student at Cleveland's Western Reserve Academy

and author of the official repository of online Doom frequently asked questions (FAQ).

Aside from the aforementioned Barney Doom, there are Star Wars Doom, where the on-screen images are replaced by characters and sounds from the *Star Wars* movies; Energizer Bunny Doom, with a familiar pink rodent and accompanying drumbeat; and even Clinton Doom, in which the rosy-cheeked face of a certain commander in chief comes out of nowhere, perhaps to harangue you about health care.

At some Internet File Transfer Protocol (FTP) sites, such as one at the University of Western Pennsylvania, there are directories stuffed with hundreds and hundreds of these Doom add-on files. One slightly masochistic Doom fan has even created a wad that replaces the faces of all the mutants with his own picture. The wad also comes with instructions on how to replace his face with a picture of anyone you'd like to riddle with bullets—your boss, your ex-girlfriend, your lunatic landlord.

As if the original version of Doom weren't scary enough. As designed, the game's plot revolves

around military contractor Union Aerospace Corp.'s radioactive waste processing plant at a U.S. military base on a Martian moon where human workers exposed to radiation have mutated into monsters. Using a variety of weapons, ranging from simple shotguns to plasma rifles that shoot rounds of plasma energy, players wander through nearly abandoned buildings, eliminating the mutants, uncovering secrets and racking up points for speed and number of kills. While playing the game you see things through the eyes of a marine sent to the moon to guard the base. But something has gone wrong and your fellow marines have been killed. It's up to you to fight the mutants and try to get off the moon.

In the sequel, *Doom II*, available only in stores, the action moves a little closer to home as the demons from the first game land on Earth, and players must keep them from destroying entire cities.

Although actual numbers are impossible to track, *Doom*'s authors at id Software Inc. estimate there are about 10 million copies of the game in play. Since its release, more than 100,000 people have registered their copies with the company. *Doom*'s first episode, "Knee Deep in the Dead," is available as shareware, which means users can download a copy onto their computer from the Internet or an online service and try it out. If they like the game, they are supposed to contact the Mesquite, Texas-based id Software, pay a \$40 fee and receive disks in the mail that add more advanced features to the game, including two additional playing levels or episodes. The only way you can add wads or customize the game—and that's where all the fun is—is if you have the registered version.

"We wrote a game we all wanted to play," says John Romero, who created the game along with designer Sandy Petersen and artists Kevin

Cloud and Adrian Carmack. And that proves to be the key to *Doom*'s popularity. Few *Doom* players express ambivalence about the game. Mark Gundy, 42, a San Diego-based stockbroker for Prudential Securities, proudly relates that "my 2-year-old was going around saying 'Doom' before he ever said 'mama.'" Gundy

ers rip out each other's spines in the midst of battle. Pong, one of the very first video games, required users to bounce a ball peacefully against a wall.)

Gundy's favorite aspect of *Doom*? It builds up a high level of anxiety. "Your pulse races. You're always concerned that something's



CHRIS KRAFT

Separated at birth? *Doom II*'s strange assortment of deadly creatures and their dastardly creators. (From left) Cloud, designer Sandy Petersen, musician Bobby Prince and Carmack.



"I love you. You love me ..." Hasta la vista, Barney!

calls *Doom* "better than any game that's ever been out. Mortal Kombat is like Pong compared to this." (*Mortal Kombat*, a popular video game, includes scenes in which play-

sneaking up on you," he says. He credits not only *Doom*'s enveloping 3-D graphics, but also its "spectacular" sound. "They sampled the sounds of real weapons, so it seems like you're actually shooting."

Doom fans who can't get enough of the game have created newsgroups (alt.fan.doom), mailing lists and exten-

sive World-Wide Web home pages packed with tips and tricks about *Doom*.

Even *Doom*'s designers can't shake the bug. Romero says he still

plays Doom every day, "though I'm down to only one or two hours."

One of Gundy's favorite ways to play the game is in "multiplayer mode" over a network or telephone lines. Doom has been designed so players whose PCs are connected over computer networks at companies or universities can play the game at the same time. There are two ways to do this: "cooperative mode," in which all players band together against the monsters, or "deathmatch mode," where players simply kill each other on sight. The popularity of multiplayer mode has made the game the bane of network administrators. Early buggy versions of Doom, since fixed, caused networks to overload and crash. Despite the fixes, companies such as Microsoft Corp. and Intel Corp. continue to outlaw its use.

If they're not connected directly by a network, players can use their modems to call the computers of other Doom players and play games over phone lines. And Gundy is currently setting up one of the first online bulletin boards for gamers to phone in from anywhere and play Doom together, four at a time.

Any game that involves non-stop bloodshed is bound to raise a few hackles, and Doom's hyper-realistic violence certainly disturbs its critics. The inability of some young players to distinguish fantasy from reality has independent children's game designer Eileen McMahon particularly concerned about the unlimited access to copies of Doom on the Internet and services such as Prodigy and America Online. "It's too bad the game is so well-designed and so life-like," she says. "You get totally involved in the experience, but all the senseless violence is a negative use of your cognitive potential." McMahon advocated age restrictions as a witness at recent hearings on violence in computer games conducted by Rep. Tom Lantos, D-Calif.

But McMahon, who has a mas-

ter's degree in children's interactive media from Harvard University, loves the idea of wads and being able to customize Doom and change its demons. "It's better to have someone there that it is meaningful for you to kill, whether it's your boss or the president, than to fire at objects with no personal connection," she says. "Instead of generalizing your hostility, you are confronting the

aggressive violence against opponents rendered helpless."

Jay Wilbur, id Software's business manager, has no problem with the concept of game ratings. "I agree that games should be rated for content, both as a parent and [as someone who wants to] avoid the wimpy games and find the good stuff."

Like it or not, Doom has set a new standard in computer games but where do its authors and their competitors go from here? If plagiarism is the sincerest form of flattery, the wizards of id Software must feel highly praised. Several Doom knockoffs are already on the market. As fans of LucasArts computer games, Romero and his cohorts welcomed that company's Dark Forces, complete with *Star Wars*' Storm Troopers as the enemies in a 3-D environment. In fact, the Star Wars game may be the ultimate Doom wad. "We heard that they hired two programmers to reverse-engineer the Doom graphics engine and build on it. They did a great job," Romero observes. Actually, the LucasArts game goes Doom one better, allowing players to look up and down, as well as to the right and left.

As other game makers catch up, id Software hopes to move on. The company is developing new versions of Doom that can be played on the Atari Jaguar video game system, Apple Computer's Macintosh and PowerPCs, and other platforms. There's been some talk of a Doom movie around Hollywood. And Doom's designers even speculate about a Doom-like Internet interface that would allow users to browse cyberspace in a 3-D way that would leave the popular Mosaic in the dust.

The day may not be far off when reading your electronic mail or transferring a file could be as invigorating as protecting a moon off Mars from mutants. Just watch your back. And keep an eye on Barney. @

Meeting Your Doom

Online Services: Go to games forums on America Online, CompuServe, Delphi, GEnie and Prodigy. At 9600 bits per second, Doom should take about 20 minutes to download in zipped, or compressed, format. After you register your copy, Doom wads and graphic and sound add-ons also can be found in those forums.

The Internet: FTP to <ftp.uwp.edu> (then change directory to </pub/msdos/games/id>) or FTP to <infant2.sphs.indiana.edu> (change directory to </pub/doom>). The most recent shareware version is [doom16bt.zip](#). Star Wars Doom is contained in files with the names [swgfx1.zip](#) through [swgfx5.zip](#). Energizer Bunny Doom is [bunny3d.zip](#). Barney Doom is in the file [bdoom.zip](#). Information on Doom is available in the Usenet newsgroup <alt.games.doom>.

- For the latest listing of Doom add-ons, utilities and answers to frequently asked questions (FAQ), e-mail: A641@cleve.land.freenet.edu and type in as the subject: "doom faq request" to have the official FAQ sent to your e-mail address. The address for the Doom World-Wide Web page is: <http://lilly.ping.de/~sven/doom.html>.

source of your anger."

Even if you did succeed in limiting access to Doom you'd still have to contend with the hundreds of wads that multiply every day. Doom has been rated a 3 out of 4 for violence by the Software Publishers Association. The SPA's top rating is only given to games featuring gratuitous violence or "a continuation of